BENTONVILLE, Ark. (January 18, 2013) – NorthWest Arkansas Community College hosted the grand opening today for its new Center for Health Professions, an 83,000-square-foot structure featuring state-of-the-art simulation labs and the latest in green building technologies.

Classes began in the new building on Monday, Jan. 14. The new Center for Health Professions houses nursing, respiratory therapy, physical therapist assistant, paramedic, emergency medical technician, fire science, certified nurse assistant and patient care assistant programs.

Mary Ross, Dean of Health Professions at NWACC, said simulation training using high-tech mannequins and collaboration among students throughout the health disciplines will be key components of students’ education in the new center.

“This collaboration among students in those disciplines will represent practical training that reflects the true working environment,” she said. In one scenario she mentioned, first responders will fine-tune skills of extricating “crash victims” from a mangled car and then paramedics/EMTs will practice loading the patient into the ambulance and administering care in the confined space that an ambulance presents. From there, respiratory therapy or nursing students also will have the opportunity to administer aid.

The Nursing Simulation Lab, made possible by a gift from Washington Regional Medical Center, features high-fidelity mannequins that can be programmed to engage NWACC nursing students in more than 100 scenarios, allowing students to be exposed to many of the real-world situations they may encounter in their work.
“We are thrilled at the many opportunities this new center will provide our current students and generations of students to come,” said Dr. Becky Paneitz, President of NWACC. “Ultimately, the new center will enhance our ability to educate and prepare those seeking a career in the health professions. That’s a positive development for our students and for the patients who will be served by these well-trained professionals. Ultimately, it’s good for our whole community.”

Ross said the new center is expected to allow the College to add some needed programs and to open up additional slots in some key areas. For example, NWACC’s physical therapist assistant instructors have been seeking to expand the number of students who can enroll in the program, which currently serves 14 students. The College also is in the process of seeking required approvals to add a program in the growing field of Health Information Management.

Ross said the College already has been able to take advantage of the new roomier facilities by enrolling more students in the Division of Health Professions. Previously, enrollment in the various disciplines was capped at about 1,350 students. This semester, about 1,700 students are enrolled.

Construction on the new center began in 2011. Crafton Tull provided the architect services, and Nabholz Construction Services was the contractor.

The cost for the total building project, including architectural fees, construction, furnishings and technology, is approximately $14.2 million.

The structure is the College’s first green building initiative through the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program. NWACC is seeking LEED silver certification for the center.

Jim Lay, NWACC’s Executive Director of Facilities and Construction Management, said sustainable practices were followed throughout the building’s design and construction and will be used in its operations and maintenance. Green initiatives included such attention to detail as sourcing raw materials within 400 miles of the college and recycling almost 80 percent of the materials leaving the job site. All of the efforts have been documented and reported to the U.S. Green Building Council.

Lay said 217 tons of material were diverted from landfills during the construction process. Energy consumption in the new building is being documented now by an independent consultant. After being collected over several months, that data also will be reported to the U.S. Green Building Council and evaluated before a final decision is made on LEED certification.

State Sen. Cecile Bledsoe was a special guest speaker for the event. Ambassadors from the Bentonville/Bella Vista and Rogers-Lowell Area chambers of commerce cut the ribbon on the new center. Prior to the dedication program, two named areas in the center were unveiled: the Washington Regional Medical Center Nursing Simulation Lab, which honors Washington Regional’s contribution to the high-fidelity simulation lab; and the Shewmaker Family Student Lounge, which recognizes the family’s generous support.

NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a smart choice for students wanting to pursue quality higher education. As an accredited institution through The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, NWACC is a public two-year institution that serves and strengthens its surrounding communities in Benton and Washington counties by helping our students maximize their potential and exceed expectations. For more information, visit www.nwacc.edu.